

Jilya



Jilya - Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Ramla Subdistrict

Jilya was a Palestinian village in the Ramla Subdistrict, situated on gently rolling hills of the coastal plain approximately 17 kilometers south of Ramla and at an average elevation of about 125 meters above sea level.

A secondary road connected Jilya with the road leading southwest toward Gaza and with the Ramla-Jerusalem road to the northeast. Other local roads connected the village with neighboring Palestinian communities.

Item	Information
Subdistrict	Ramla

Item	Information
Mandate District	Lydda
Distance from Ramla	Approximately 17 km south
Average Elevation	Approximately 125 meters
Population in 1922	269
Population in 1931	271 in 63 occupied houses
Population in 1944/1945	330
Estimated Population in 1948	383 according to Salman Abu Sitta's Register - a later estimate, not an official census
Total Land Area	10,347 dunums
Occupation / Depopulation Date	9–10 July 1948
Military Operation	Operation An-Far / Giv'ati clearing operations south of Ramla in the Hebron foothills
Military Unit	Giv'ati Brigade
Main Refuge Destination	Hebron area
Post-1948 Settlements	No Israeli settlements are documented on Jilya village land

Name and Earlier History

Jilya may have been built on the site of an ancient settlement known in the Roman period as **Galla**.

In 1596, Jilya was recorded in the nahiya of Gaza in the liwa' of Gaza with an estimated population of 94.

The village paid taxes on wheat and barley as well as goats, beehives, vineyards, and other agricultural production.

Jilya itself should not be confused with ancient Ekron. Khirbat al-Muqanna', located a little over one kilometer northwest of Jilya, was identified with the ancient Philistine site of Ekron.

The Village in the Late Nineteenth Century

In the late nineteenth century Jilya was described as a village constructed of stone and mud.

Its built-up area was rectangular, extending from southeast to northwest.

During the later Mandate period, construction expanded toward the southwest along the road leading to al-Khayma.

Population

Jilya's Mandate-era population was Muslim.

Year	Population	Nature of Figure
1596	94	Estimate derived from Ottoman records
1922	269	Official Census of Palestine
1931	271	Official Census of Palestine
1944/1945	330	Government of Palestine statistics
1948	383	Later demographic estimate in Salman Abu Sitta's Register

Number of Houses

The official 1931 Census of Palestine recorded **63 occupied houses** in Jilya.

Some later databases estimate approximately 89 houses for 1948, but this is not an official housing census and should not be treated as equivalent to the 1931 figure.

Land Ownership in 1944/1945

Jilya's total land area was **10,347 dunums**.

Total	10,347
Ownership Category	Area in Dunums
Palestinian	10,345
Transferred to Zionists	0
Communal/Public	2

The official Government of Palestine categories were Arab, Jewish, and Public: 10,345 Arab dunums, zero in the Jewish category, and two public dunums.

Land Use in 1944/1945

Total	10,347
Land Use	Area in Dunums
Citrus and Bananas	40
Cereals	7,677
Total Cultivable Land	7,717
Built-up Area	7
Non-Cultivable Land	2,623

Palestine Remembered also lists 40 dunums of olive groves. That figure is treated as a separate thematic statistic and is not added again to the 7,717-dunum cultivable total, avoiding double counting.

Economic Life

Jilya's economy was based primarily on agriculture.

The villagers cultivated cereals, vegetables, and fruit, including citrus and bananas.

Fruit orchards to the north and west were irrigated from several wells, while most other crops depended on rainfall.

The hilly land east of the village was used as grazing ground for livestock.

Water

Several wells north and west of Jilya supplied irrigation water for the village's fruit orchards and contributed to local water needs.

An ancient well was also recorded among the archaeological remains at the site.

Mosque and Shops

Jilya had a mosque serving its Muslim population and several small shops.

These formed part of the social and commercial center of the compact village.

Education

In 1945 Jilya shared an elementary school with the neighboring villages of **Qazaza and Sajad**.

The shared school was an example of educational cooperation among several small rural communities during the final years of the British Mandate.

Archaeological Remains

Jilya contained archaeological remains including:

- Foundations of earlier buildings.
- Rock-cut tombs.
- An ancient well.

Khirbat al-Muqanna' northwest of Jilya was identified with ancient Ekron and was the subject of archaeological excavations beginning in 1981.

Military Situation before Jilya's Fall

Jilya lay among a group of villages south of Ramla and along the lower Hebron foothills that came under a major Giv'ati offensive after the end of the First Truce in July 1948.

The occupation of Tall al-Safi was particularly important because it severed several of these villages from Egyptian and Palestinian militia forces positioned to the east and south.

Operation An-Far

Operation An-Far began during the night of 8–9 July 1948 and continued until 15 July.

It was conducted by the Giv'ati Brigade on the southern front and aimed to expand Israeli-held territory eastward and southward and attempt to establish a connection toward the Jewish settlements in the Naqab.

The offensive included a series of village-clearing actions in the arc south of Ramla between the coastal plain and the Hebron hills.

Jilya fell within the same Giv'ati advance on 9–10 July.

Correcting the Confusion with Operation Dani

Some later databases classify Jilya under the first stage of Operation Dani and name the Yiftach Brigade as the attacking unit.

This conflicts with Walid Khalidi's account, PalQuest's Jilya entry, and Palestine Land Society documentation.

The stronger evidence identifies the **Giv'ati Brigade** as the force that overran Jilya on 9–10 July during its clearing operations south of Ramla.

Operation Dani was a separate offensive that began on 9 July and focused in its

first stage on Lydda and Ramla. PalQuest's Operation Dani entry does not list Jilya among its affected villages.

This article therefore identifies **Operation An-Far / associated Giv'ati clearing operations** as the more accurate military context for Jilya.

Occupation and Depopulation

Jilya fell to the Giv'ati Brigade on **9-10 July 1948**.

Khalidi's account states that residents of the area fled as Israeli columns approached, especially following the fall of Tall al-Safi and the resulting isolation from Arab forces to the east and south.

Most Jilya villagers subsequently sought refuge in the Hebron area.

Additional documentation published by Palestine Land Society, citing a Giv'ati Brigade report dated 16 July, records Jilya among villages whose inhabitants were expelled and where a number of houses were blown up and burned.

The available evidence therefore indicates both flight in the face of the advancing military forces and subsequent expulsion and destruction during Giv'ati's consolidation of the area.

Occupation and Displacement Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Pre-Nakba Village	Until 1948	A Palestinian agricultural village with 330 inhabitants in 1944/45 and 10,347 dunums of land.
End of the First Truce	8 July 1948	Fighting resumed on the southern front.
Beginning of Operation An-Far	Night of 8-9 July 1948	The Giv'ati Brigade began its offensive south of Ramla toward the Naqab.

Stage	Date	Details
Occupation and Initial Displacement	9–10 July 1948	Giv'ati forces overran Jilya; most villagers eventually fled toward the Hebron region.
Giv'ati Brigade Report	16 July 1948	A brigade report listed Jilya among villages whose inhabitants had been expelled and where houses were blown up and burned.

Military Unit

Military Unit: Giv'ati Brigade.

The principal sources place Jilya within the Giv'ati offensive in the lower Hebron foothills south of Ramla during the Ten Days between the two truces.

There is insufficient evidence to identify the Yiftach Brigade as the unit that occupied Jilya despite that attribution appearing in some secondary statistical databases.

Cause of Displacement

Jilya's depopulation was connected with the advance of Israeli forces belonging to the Giv'ati Brigade and the collapse of the surrounding defensive position following the occupation of Tall al-Safi.

Some residents fled before the advancing columns, while Giv'ati documentation subsequently recorded the removal of inhabitants from the group of villages that included Jilya and the demolition and burning of houses.

The most accurate description is therefore **flight under military attack combined with expulsion and clearing after Giv'ati forces entered the area.**

Refuge Destination

The principal historical account states that most of Jilya's inhabitants sought refuge in the **Hebron region**.

Salman Abu Sitta estimated Jilya's 1948 population at 383, while an older demographic register reproduced an estimate of approximately 2,351 refugees and descendants in 1998.

These later figures are demographic estimates rather than comprehensive official refugee censuses.

Extent of Destruction

Military documentation records the blowing up and burning of a number of houses in Jilya following occupation.

The principal sources do not provide a complete postwar building inventory from which a precise percentage of destruction can be calculated.

No unsupported figure such as “100 percent destroyed” is therefore used.

Israeli Settlements on Jilya Land

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, **no Israeli settlements were established on Jilya village land**.

Nearby settlements should therefore not be described as being “on Jilya land” solely because of geographic proximity.

Jilya Today

The available description of the site comes from the historical field research incorporated into Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains* and is not a direct 2026 field verification.

According to that description, the **area is fenced and inaccessible**.

The restricted access prevented a complete field inventory of the village remains.

Historically documented archaeological features—including building foundations, rock-cut tombs, and an ancient well—remain part of Jilya's recorded landscape, but their precise current condition would require a new field survey.

Sources

- [PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Jilya](#)
- [PalQuest – Operation An-Far](#)
- [Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1922](#)
- [Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine, 1931: Jilya, 271 inhabitants and 63 occupied houses](#)
- [Government of Palestine / Sami Hadawi – Village Statistics 1945](#)
- [Palestine Remembered – Jilya entry from All That Remains](#)
- [Salman Abu Sitta – Register of Depopulated Palestinian Localities: Jilya](#)
- [Palestine Land Society – Documentation of Jilya's July 1948 expulsion and destruction](#)